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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: MALAWI: UP TO 20,000 AFFECTED BY SOUTH AFRICAN XENOPHOBIC VIOLENCE

REF: STATE 060861

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11. (SBU): Summary: An estimated twenty thousand Malawians have been affected by the xenophobic violence in South Africa. Since the attacks began May 11, five Malawians have been killed and many others left injured or homeless. The GOM provided buses that have evacuated nearly 1,000 of the country's citizens from South Africa, but thousands more remain. Malawi has been working to repatriate those who had immigrated to the country. The violence has damaged South Africa's reputation in Malawi as a haven for foreigners in search of employment and wealth. End summary.

12. (U) The government of Malawi (GOM) estimates that up to twenty thousand Malawians have been affected by the xenophobic violence in South Africa. Since the attacks began on May 11, five Malawians have been killed and many others left injured or homeless. On May 18, 39-year-old Malawian Jonas Karuzi Simkonda died of head injuries he sustained during an attack in Johannesburg. Four days later, a second Malawian was shot to death in Durban. On June 7, another Malawian was killed in a South African attack: 26-year-old Daison Mpata was fatally stabbed in Johannesburg's township of Soweto. Two other Malawians have also died as a result of the violence.

13. (U) Malawian press reported many Malawians flooded diplomatic missions in South Africa in search of relief items and evacuation, and Malawian civil society organizations blamed the GOM for not doing enough to help. Upon hearing reports of hundreds camping at police stations and other sites that had been designated to harbor the refugees, the GOM created a disaster committee chaired by the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security, and promised to assist those who needed to be evacuated. Minister of Foreign Affairs Joyce Banda visited the Malawian mission in South Africa May 22 where she was briefed about the situation.

14. (U) The GOM hired buses from South Africa to return Malawians to their home country. The first two buses arrived on May 25 where the people were screened at the social welfare offices in Blantyre to establish their identities. According to Jeffrey Kanyinji, Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Civic Education, the repatriation process will continue as long as there are Malawians willing to return home. Unfortunately, many xenophobia victims remain stranded in Cape Town, as the buses only leave from Johannesburg and Durban, and the distance between the cities is too far for many Malawians in South Africa to travel on their own. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is currently working on logistics to transport victims from Cape Town. Meanwhile, some Malawians refuse to leave South Africa, as they would rather stay in hiding than face poverty and hunger in their own country.

15. (U) FM Banda told the press she expects the government to repatriate about 15,000 Malawians fleeing the xenophobic violence. Despite meeting South African President Thabo Mbeki during the World Economic Forum in early June, President Bingu wa Mutharika told media he did not discuss the xenophobic violence with him, and insisted that the media exaggerated the situation.

16. (U) The Ministry of Women and Child Development, with help from the Red Cross, has established temporary accommodations for the returnees at the Blantyre Welfare Centre. Each bus that the Malawian government hired has cost over \$5,000 USD. Since most returnees arrived with no money or personal belongings, the GOM is using a collective passport for them. According to Kanyinji, so far, all of the people to arrive at the Blantyre Welfare Centre have been genuine Malawians. However, the GOM has been non-committal on whether it will set aside a special fund for the xenophobia victims.

Minister of Women and Child Development Anna Kachikho ruled out the possibility of creating starter kits for the returnees. She publicly stated that the Ministry was only responsible for receiving the victims and making sure that they reach their homes, as they are already providing food, medical care, and transport for the returned Malawians.

17. (U) In light of fears that the large number of returnees would cause unemployment rates to rise, Kachikho insisted that if the Malawians were able to make a living in South Africa, then they would be able to find jobs in their home country. She continued that the xenophobia victims were not included in the 2008-09 national budget allocated to the Ministry of Women and Child Development, but that the government was always prepared for such eventualities. The Office of President and Cabinet (OPC) has given the ministry \$14,085 USD that is being used for expenses such as transport within Malawi and food at the Social Welfare Office.

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18. (SBU) Comment: Many Malawians believe that the long history of Malawian workers in South Africa creates an obligation for South Africa to provide better treatment for affected foreigners than has been the case to date. The Malawi-based Human Rights Consultative Committee (HRCC) demanded that the South African government compensate Malawians who have lost property, as well as the families of those who have died in the xenophobic attacks. At a Malawi-South Africa Joint Commission of Cooperation (JCC) ceremony in Blantyre, South African Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Aziz Pahad said that his country's government is deeply shocked by the violence and has sent condolence messages to the families of the five Malawians who were killed. However, the violence is likely to damage South Africa's reputation in Malawi as a haven for foreigners in search of employment and wealth. End comment.

EASTHAM